Meeting Minutes

Douglas Elementary PTO

November 21, 2024 Douglas Elementary 8:30Am

**Board Members: Birdie Holley, President – Ingrid Benson, Vice President – Chris Bowman, Treasurer – Raechel Hardin, Secretary – Michaelle Gust, DES Principal**

Meeting called to order by: Birdie Holley, President Attendance: 9

Board Members not present: Ingrid Benson

Minutes: October meeting minutes approved via email.

**Officer Updates**

**President: Birdie Holley** (birdiewester@gmail.com)

* Birdie has developed a timeline to assist future PTO board members in maintaining continuity during her absence next year. The PTO closet is nearly finished; the shelves are installed, and most items are organized and in their designated places. We are utilizing the large file cabinet in the closet to store extra supplies for teachers, while the smaller file cabinet will be designated for PTO paperwork, including the budget, audit documents and monthly reports.
* Next year's board member positions are open, and several individuals have expressed interest. Raechel Hardin is willing to take on the role of president, and Gaby Cote is considering the vice president position. We have also approached Renee Russell about stepping in as treasurer; she will work with Chris this year to familiarize herself with the processes. The secretary position is also open, and a few individuals have shown interest. Additionally, we plan to vote on adding Becky Starring as a member-at-large to the PTO board in the upcoming meeting. If you would like to be considered for any of these board positions, please reach out to Raechel Hardin at rhardinfbs@gmail.com.
* **Vice President: Ingrid Benson** (ingbenson2@gmail.com)
* No update.

**Treasurer: Chris Bowman**  (cjames.bowman@gmail.com)

* If you are a part of a committee and make a purchase, in addition to submitting a copy of your receipt via the expense form on the website, it is important to note what committee specifically the purchase was for, so we are able to document it accurately.
* A $1,080.84 invoice from Holland Litho for the Reading Month posters, originally sent in March to a PTO member, was not submitted to the treasurer until late July, highlighting the importance of timely invoice submission and expense tracking for project leads, especially for larger transactions.
* We need to increase the budget for administrative costs to account for expenses such as filing taxes, shelving, and the website. Currently, we have $500 allocated, but we should consider raising that amount to adequately cover these costs. It's important to budget slightly over our total to remain diligent throughout the year. Additionally, we should establish a discretionary line to handle unexpected expenses. It has been proposed to increase our admin budget from $500 to $1,200, which has been approved. Furthermore, it has been proposed to allocate $2,500 for discretionary funds, which has also been approved. This will allow us to manage unforeseen costs without needing to reapprove the entire budget.
* Birdie will meet with Mark Neidlinger on the 22nd to discuss how transportation costs for field trips are covered currently, and requested it be changed for the 2024-2025 school year.  The PTO is requesting the school cover more of the costs in regards to bussing as we want to cover the field trip expenses only.

**Meeting Information**

* **Principal Update (Michaelle Gust):** No Update. Michaelle was out of town celebrating the birth of her new granddaughter! Congratulations, Michaelle and family!
* **Teacher Update (Mrs. Hale):** The PTO meeting was conducted during school hours, so teachers were not able to be present. Birdie stated that she is meeting with Mark Neidlinger on the 22nds and will talk to him about possibly having some of the high schoolers come to help the kids with the VR headsets.
* **Arbor Circle Presentation:** Arbor Circle is a nonprofit organization based in West Michigan that focuses on child welfare. In recent years, they have significantly increased their services in Allegan County. There has been a notable rise in the demand for foster care and adoption services, highlighting a critical need for foster parents in Michigan, particularly in Allegan County. With few agencies available to assist these children, Arbor Circle is actively reaching out to the community to raise awareness about the urgent need for foster families in the area. Many of the children entering the system come from backgrounds of neglect and trauma, requiring either short-term or long-term placements while their families engage in reunification services. Arbor Circle is eager to connect with families interested in becoming foster parents and would like the PTO's assistance in spreading the word about this need. To become a foster family, applicants must obtain licensing through the state of Michigan, which involves an intensive assessment process and adherence to specific regulations learned during orientation. This includes home visits, background checks, employment history evaluations, and an assessment of parenting styles. Children entering care often have experienced trauma and may exhibit challenging behaviors, so it is crucial for foster parents to be prepared to address these issues. References are gathered for the family, which are then submitted to the state for approval. The entire process typically takes about six months. If you are interested in finding out more information, please contact them at 616-456-6571 or email at placement@arborcircle.org. Check out their website at www.arborcircle.org/foster
* **SCA Update (Whitney):** March Reading Month is progressing with an assembly scheduled for April. The SCA would love if the school would organize a field trip for the students to visit the SCA's exhibition titled "Failabration." This exhibition aims to explore the concept of failure and how to cope with it. The SCA offers numerous opportunities, including after-school clubs and summer camps, and Whitney wants to collaborate with the PTO to promote these offerings to students. There will be costs associated with these services, and the PTO may be asked to support funding for these field trips in the future. Whitney hopes to raise awareness in the community and among the school about the various programs the SCA provides and encourages Douglas Elementary to take advantage of these opportunities for the students.
* **Garden Update (Dana):** Boys and Girls Club has been using this space as well as maintaining the garden. This allows the SCA to be less involved but are willing to step in with help as needed.
* **Holiday Workshop Update (Alison/Traci):** A Sign-up Genius has been distributed, and we already have some volunteers on board. However, more help is needed, so we will be resending the sign-up this week. The younger classes require the most assistance, so please keep that in mind when signing up. Alison and Traci were able to come in under budget due to a surplus of materials from last year.
* **Book Fair Update (Becky):** The book fair was a great success, with total sales reaching $8,590. The Share the Fair, a donation-based program, generated approximately $208, which Becky used to buy books for children who missed out on the book fair. Additionally, $881 was spent on books for the book vending machine, and we received 25% cash back by utilizing the book fair funds.
* We are currently awaiting financial forms from Scholastic and are discussing whether to take all cash, Scholastic dollars, or a combination of both for our earnings. Becky believes the best option will depend on which choice allows us to maximize our funds for purchasing books. While Scholastic dollars offer a higher value, the selection of books is limited; conversely, opting for cash provides less overall but grants us the freedom to choose any books we desire.
* Becky is willing to lead the book fair again in the future but would need a colleague to assist her. If anyone is interested, please reach out to Raechel Hardin at rhardinfbs@gmail.com.

* **Parent/Teacher Meals Update (John):** Teacher’s stated they thoroughly enjoyed the meals and expressed their sincerest gratitude for the delicious food. The PTO was asked why we don’t fund the parent/teacher conference meals. Generally, parents enjoy bringing food for the teachers, so we haven’t needed to fund this endeavor. If there is a need to fund this in the future the PTO would be happy to do so.
* **Eloquence Day (Meagan):** No update. This takes place in May.
* **Holiday Lights Update (Kelli):** The outside lights and decorations have been put up by Kelli Bowman and family and look very festive.
* **Member Comments:** A parent recommended a company that produces stainless steel lunch trays and offers a grant program for full reimbursements to schools. She inquired whether we would be interested in acquiring these trays for the cafeteria, as she believes they would be a better option than the plastic trays we currently use. The company is called Ahmisa, and she will research further to gather more information about the grant reimbursement. She will also consult with Mrs. Gust and the lunchroom staff to gather their ideas and opinions on this proposal.

Meeting Adjourned At: 9:45 am

Minutes Compiled By: Raechel Hardin, Secretary